In Pursuit of the Library Makerspace

Allison Hall

In September 2014, I found myself in the fortunate position of opening a new school library. After almost a year, I finally found the time to breathe and reflect on my progress. I had books in place, both the kinds the kids love and the ones necessary to support the curriculum, the technology was there, and the furniture was accessible, transportable and comfortable. Students were visiting the space daily to work on projects, collaborate with each other using technology and learn through inquiry. Still I wondered, what makes a library learning commons extraordinary? What is the next step I can take in the evolution of my learning space? As I began my research, one word kept popping up over and over again, 'makerspace'. I was intrigued. What was it all about?

According to the website, *Thinkers and Tinkers*, the makerspace arose as part of the Maker Movement, "a grass roots drive that encourages people of all ages to explore the DIY culture of fixing, improving and creating." In the school library setting, a makerspace is a place where students can collaborate, explore, and learn, through building and creating new things using problem solving and inquiry skills in the process. It is constructivist learning at its best. Students can draw on specific interests with each project they undertake. A library makerspace is flexible; it can be anything you want it to be. There is no set formula or design and you do not need expensive equipment to get started.

Diana Rendina, media specialist/ school librarian at Stewart Middle Magnet School in Tampa, FL., decided to transform her library into a place where students would become excited about learning. She began simply with boxes of K'nex and Lego but quickly her makerspace grew to include a littleBits Pro Library and a Lego wall. Diana believes that "a makerspace can be anything from a repurposed book cart filled with arts and crafts supplies to a table in a corner set out with LEGOs to a full blown fab lab with 3D printers, laser cutters, and hand tools. No two school makerspaces are exactly alike, nor should they be."

The makerspace is a place of inquiry, where students have the freedom to decide what they want to do and have the opportunity to collaborate with others through the project process. Laura Fleming, a Library Media Specialist for grades 9-12 at New Milford High School in New Jersey, does not believe that students should be directed as to what they create or tied down to lessons and curriculum:

> A cornerstone of my library makerspace is that it is a unique learning environment that is focused almost solely on informal learning. What does this mean exactly? It means that my students are not told that they have to visit the makerspace, nor are they told what they have to do when they